United Nations S/PV.8188

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8188th meeting

Saturday, 24 February 2018, noon

New York

President:	Mr. Alotaibi	(Kuwait)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

18-05017 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 2.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2018/146, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, France, Kuwait, the Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Sweden, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

I now give the floor to members of the Council who wish to make statements before the voting.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): Sweden and Kuwait earlier this week put forward a draft resolution to respond to the desperate calls of the United Nations and the humanitarian community in Syria for a cessation of hostilities for an initial period of 30 days, in order to allow for much-needed humanitarian relief. We have been working intensely with all Council members to operationalize the concrete requests of the United Nations, the humanitarian community and, above, all the civilian population on the ground. We have done our utmost to accommodate Council members' concerns. It is now time for the Council to unanimously shoulder its responsibility and show that meaningful action is possible.

The key components in our draft resolution are a nationwide cessation of hostilities for at least 30 days, weekly United Nations humanitarian aid convoys to all areas in need, and immediate emergency medical evacuations. The United Nations convoys and evacuation teams are ready to go. The draft resolution also calls for the immediate lifting of sieges of populated areas, including eastern Ghouta. It reiterates its demand, reminding in particular the Syrian authorities that all parties have an obligation to act in accordance with international law to protect civilians and hospitals and other medical facilities.

The draft makes an exception for military operations directed against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Al-Qaida, the Al-Nusra Front and other terrorist groups designated by the Security Council. This in no way relieves the parties to the conflict in Syria from upholding their obligations under international law at all times, including the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution.

The draft resolution is not a comprehensive peace deal on Syria; its aim is purely humanitarian. There are already ceasefire agreements in force for the areas where fighting has escalated the most. They need to be complied with. There are existing monitoring mechanisms that can be utilized. The role of the Council is to push the parties to the conflict to comply with the proposed cessation of hostilities in order to urgently enable needed alleviation of suffering for the people of Syria. If the draft resolution is adopted today, it can de-escalate violence, save lives, alleviate suffering and break the deadlock on humanitarian access and sieges.

Since the first call for a cessation of hostilities, the situation has gotten dramatically worse, particularly in eastern Ghouta, as we have heard from the Secretary-General and from Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock. After seven years of war, the situation for innocent civilians in Syria has never been worse. But we have an opportunity to turn things around today to avert the disaster unfolding before our eyes.

The draft resolution before the Council represents a resolute and very urgent attempt for the Council to take decisive and meaningful action. Today, we count on each and every member to do the right thing.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, France, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Russian Federation, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2401 (2018).

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Kuwait.

I associate myself with the statement just made by the Permanent Representative of Sweden on our behalf.

The unanimous adoption today of resolution 2401 (2018), following lengthy and intensive negotiations, demonstrates that the penholders, Kuwait and Sweden, are keen to ensure unanimity on this important humanitarian resolution. The resolution renews hope in the Security Council's ability to be unified and speak in one voice, sending a clear and explicit message that it rejects any violations of the Charter of the United Nations.

I wish to thank all Member States that voted in favour of the resolution, which includes key and specific demands in response to the appeals of the international community, the most important of which are as follows. First, it demands that all parties cease fire without delay throughout Syria for a minimum of 30 days. Secondly, it allows the United Nations and its partners to immediately undertake medical evacuations safely and unconditionally. Thirdly, it requires all parties to ensure the unimpeded and safe access of all humanitarian and medical workers. Fourthly, it calls on all parties to lift the siege of populated areas, including eastern Ghouta.

We are totally convinced that, while the resolution may not end the humanitarian suffering in Syria at once, it is a positive message that the Council today is solidary and united to end this humanitarian suffering and hostilities right away. The biggest task now is to ensure the implementation of the provisions of the resolution in order to save civilian lives in Syria and deliver their humanitarian needs immediately.

The Security Council still has a great deal to do so as to end this tragic crisis in Syria, which is about to complete its seventh year. The resolution that we have adopted today is only an interim solution, as a political solution in Syria is the only way to achieve a comprehensive settlement of the crisis and meet the aspirations of the brotherly Syrian people, in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions, especially resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

The State of Kuwait stresses the importance of reaching an agreement among Council members to prevent any attempt to obstruct a draft resolution aimed at stopping flagrant violations of human rights. Kuwait supports the code of conduct proposed by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group, whereby Council members would pledge not to obstruct draft resolutions that address crimes against humanity, genocide and war crimes. We also support the Mexican-French initiative calling on restraint in the use of the veto in the event of serious violations of human rights, based on our commitments to abide by the four Geneva Conventions and their Protocols, international humanitarian law and the outcomes of the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit.

We call for engagement on general humanitarian issues, such as the delivery of humanitarian aid, the evacuation of the sick and injured, and humanitarian truce, as procedural issues. In order to prevent the recurrence of such tragedies and the great suffering of humankind, the veto must not be used in such instances.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the other members of the Council that wish to make statements.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I want to thank the penholders, Sweden and Kuwait, for their work, their sacrifice and their time in the negotiations. As we look at the negotiations, I think it is also important that we bring the Council some of the voices of the Syrian people in eastern Ghouta, who have suffered so much while waiting for the Security Council to act.

A doctor treating patients in a makeshift hospital described the conditions she is facing: "We are mental and emotional wrecks. There is nothing more we can do. We are bled dry." In a haunting video, the doctor walks into a room with a crying mother as she says,

> "I am waiting for my son to die. At least he will be free of pain. I was just making bread for him when the roof fell in. He is going straight to heaven. At least in heaven there is food."

Another message we received yesterday which I think was relayed to Council members in the closed consultations, but which I think it is important to repeat again — was an emergency call from a doctor in eastern Ghouta, who said:

> "We have a horrible situation here. We are being targeted with all kinds of weapons, non-stop. We lack everything: water, food, medical supplies,

shelter. This is a disaster. Everyone is just waiting to die."

Today, the Security Council finally took a step towards addressing these devastating levels of human suffering in Syria. The United States wants nothing more than to see the ceasefire in resolution 2401 (2018) implemented immediately across the country. It is critical that the Al-Assad regime and its allies comply with our demand to stop the assault on eastern Ghouta and immediately allow food and medicine to reach everyone who needs it. All of us on the Council must do our part to press the Al-Assad regime as hard as we can to comply.

But we are late to respond to this crisis — very late. On Wednesday, the Secretary-General made an emotional plea for an immediate ceasefire in Syria to allow the very basic necessities to get to the people. Kuwait and Sweden had a version of the resolution ready to go for a vote, but Russia called for a delay. On Thursday, in an effort to stall, Russia called for an open meeting on the humanitarian situation in Syria. At that meeting (S/PV.8186), 14 members of the Council were ready to impose a ceasefire, but Russia obstructed the vote again. And then yesterday, the Council sat around for hours, ready to vote, only to have Russia delay it again.

Every minute the Council waited on Russia, the human suffering grew. Getting to a vote became a moral responsibility for everyone, but not for Russia, not for Syria, and not for Iran. I have to ask: why? At least 19 health facilities have been bombed since Sunday. As they dragged out the negotiations, the bombs from Al-Assad's fighter jets continued to fall. In the three days it took us to adopt the resolution, how many mothers lost their kids to the bombing and the shelling? How many more images did we need to see of fathers holding their dead children? All for nothing, because here we are voting for a ceasefire that could have saved lives days ago.

And after all of this time, hardly anything has changed in the resolution except a few words and some commas. The Syrian people should not have to die waiting for Russia to organize its instructions from Moscow or to discuss them with the Syrians. Why did the Council allow this? There is no good reason we should not have done this Wednesday, or Thursday, or Friday. We may not know the faces that we are talking about. We may not know their names, or these people, but they know us. And we all failed them this week. I guess there is unity in that.

Today, Russia has belatedly decided to join the international consensus and accept the need to call for a ceasefire, but only after trying every possible way to avoid it. The resolution marks a moment of Council unity that we must seize and maintain beyond the 30-day timeframe. We hope that the resolution will be a turning point, where Russia will join us in pushing for a political settlement to this conflict and take action to re-establish real accountability for the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

Progress starts by adhering to the ceasefire with no excuses. After so many years of defying the Council's demands, the Al-Assad regime must change course. None of us should be so naïve as to accept that the Al-Assad regime can continue indiscriminately bombing schools, hospitals and homes under the fake excuse of "counter-terrorism". Al-Assad's bombing must stop. The ceasefire must be given a chance to work. We look to the Al-Assad regime's backers, especially Russia and Iran, to address what the Secretary-General rightly called a "hell on Earth". All eyes will now be on the Syrian regime, Iran and Russia.

Our goal with this resolution is clear. The Al-Assad regime needs to stop its military activities around eastern Ghouta, and for once allow humanitarian access to all of those who need it. We are deeply skeptical that the regime will comply, but we supported the resolution because we must demand nothing less. We owe that to the innocent people of Syria begging for help.

In the days to come, our resolve to stand by our demands in the resolution will be tested. All of us must rise to the challenge of maintaining this ceasefire, just as we came together today. All of us must do everything we can to make the demands of the resolution a reality. That is the only way to restore the credibility of the Council. The Syrian people have been waiting long enough.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Following lengthy consultations, during which the overwhelming majority of delegations demonstrated a sincere focus on seeking joint solutions — for which we thank them — the Security Council has unanimously adopted the humanitarian resolution 2401 (2018), on Syria. I wish to particularly thank the penholders, the Permanent Representatives of Kuwait and Sweden, for their tireless efforts

and resolve to reach a compromise up until the very last moment. Russia supports the resolution because it encourages the Syrian parties to work as quickly as possible to bring a halt to the hostilities, comply with previous agreed-on decisions in that regard, engage in negotiations on a general de-escalation and establish extended humanitarian pauses throughout the country.

The reason it took us so long to reach agreement on the resolution was because we did not support the directives it included for an immediate cessation of hostilities for a relatively long period, and the reason for that was simply because it was unachievable in that form. A ceasefire would not have happened if we had adopted the directives without any concrete agreement between the warring parties, and any approach so removed from reality would definitely not help to address the pressing humanitarian problems in Syria. It will be crucial to ensure that the Security Council's demands are reinforced by concrete agreements on the ground.

It would be naive to think that any of these complicated issues can be resolved overnight. We trust that all the external stakeholders with influence will work to bring that about. We can see that some foreign sponsors of the illegal armed groups have either fallen very short in that regard or have been deliberately flouting their obligations. Russia is working with all the parties to the conflict and doing everything possible to normalize the situation and actively assist the humanitarian efforts. Iran and Turkey, our partners in the Astana process, have taken on a major part of the work, and we are preparing for an important meeting in the Astana format next month. In the southern de-escalation zone a fairly decent level of cooperation has been established with Jordan and the United States, although we have been seeing tension rising in some areas owing to activity by armed groups.

The resolution clearly states that it does not apply to military operations against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Jabhat Al-Nusra, other Al-Qaida-affiliated organizations and various groups that the Security Council has recognized as terrorists. That struggle that will continue. We call on international stakeholders to coordinate closely on this issue, including with the Syrian authorities, and in strict compliance with international law and with respect for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The goal of combating terrorism must not become a pretext for solving this or that geopolitical issue of dubious legitimacy, which is exactly what the United States is doing in Syria.

Instead of being drowned in rhetoric about Russia — and by the way, next time I am going to count the number of times Ambassador Haley mentions my country — what we are insisting on is a prompt end to the occupation-style efforts of the so-called coalition, which, among other things, would have a definite humanitarian impact, enabling the Syrian Government to address the issue of restoring normal life in all the areas that have been liberated from terrorists, including in the north and the east of the country. Closing the coalition's Al-Tanf military base would solve the problem of the internally displaced persons in the Rukban camp. In that connection, we would also like to point out that every effort should be made to deliver aid via the most direct routes, as provided for in the humanitarian resolutions on Syria.

It is important that today's resolution calls for speeding up the immediate deployment of humanitarian mine-clearing operations throughout Syria. It also reiterates the demand that all parties demilitarize medical facilities, schools and other civilian infrastructure and refrain from establishing military positions in residential areas, something that the illegal armed groups have frequently been guilty of. The conflict's flashpoints are more clearly identified, and are not limited to eastern Ghouta and Idlib, and that includes Raqqa, which the coalition has laid waste. It also expresses indignation at the militias' shelling of Damascus, in which our Embassy has been hit several times. We know that the humanitarian situation in Syria is dire and in urgent need of effective measures, but we can see perfectly well that the propagandistic picture being painted of eastern Ghouta is identical to the loud campaign in late 2016 during the counter-terrorist operation to liberate eastern Aleppo. We must engage not just with eastern Ghouta, but with Raqqa, Rukban, Foah, Kefraya and Yarmouk. Every area of Syria should get help.

The resolution emphasizes the importance of supporting the restoration of stability in the areas that civilians are returning to, which in our view sends an unambiguous message to those capitals that continue to make restoration assistance conditional on a specific transitional direction in the political process. It stipulates that the humanitarian priorities for Syria in 2018 are not limited to Under-Secretary-General Lowcock's five requests. The agenda is far broader. We

hope in particular that the specialized United Nations agencies and their partners will be sensitive to requests from the Syrian authorities.

In conclusion, I would like to express my deep concern about the public statements by certain United States officials threatening aggression against Syria, a sovereign country. This is a warning that we will not countenance any arbitrary interpretation of the resolution that has just been adopted. We demand an end to this irresponsible and hateful rhetoric. Rather, there should be joint efforts to settle the conflict in Syria on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): France welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), which demands that a cessation of hostilities be established without delay throughout Syria, in order to enable humanitarian personnel to evacuate the wounded and to gain access to the population. The negotiations were arduous. However, despite their differences in approach, the members of the Security Council managed to prevail in the name of the humanitarian imperative. The resolution is vital in the true meaning of that word, since halting the shelling and evacuating the wounded are matters of life and death for thousands of Syrian people, especially in eastern Ghouta, which has been under siege by the Damascus regime for days. I would like to thank the delegations of Kuwait and Sweden — which introduced the resolution, with our support — for their efforts, perseverance and outstanding work in arriving at a robust text.

As by President Macron and the Secretary-General forcefully recalled last Wednesday, it is imperative and urgent to end the shelling of eastern Ghouta, Idlib and the whole of Syrian territory immediately. That was the thrust of yesterday's joint call by President Macron and Chancellor Angela Merkel to President Putin during their demanding and close conversation on the issue. It is also the reason for our vote today. The resolution is the outcome of our concerted efforts, as well as a belated response to the violence unleashed against civilians in eastern Ghouta and elsewhere.

Let us make no mistake: a cessation of hostilities for an initial 30 days to enable humanitarian access to meet vital urgent needs is only the very first step. It is the minimal response to the repeated demands of both the United Nations and humanitarian actors, which have been conveyed for months by Council members, in particular by France.

It is now up to the regime's supporters to ensure full compliance with the cessation of hostilities without delay and to respond to all requests for access to humanitarian assistance and medical evacuations in accordance with the text we have just adopted. We specifically call on the guarantors of the Astana process to assume their responsibilities and effectively ensure that the Syrian regime immediately cease its hostilities and ensure respect for the basic principles and rules of international humanitarian law and human rights law. It is urgent that humanitarian assistance reach without delay the people who need it. Every minute counts because every minute can lead to the loss of lives.

Nothing would be worse than to see this resolution remain a dead letter. That is why France will be extremely vigilant on all those points over the coming hours and days.

We all know that a return to stability in Syria is the only way to put a definitive end to the humanitarian crisis, for which a political solution is required. More than ever, therefore, we must redouble our efforts to establish a neutral environment that will enable a credible political process and elections to be held in Syria, as part of the Geneva process and resolution 2254 (2015). France is ready to continue working tirelessly with its partners to that end.

As we said yesterday in this forum, the elements for a regional and potentially major international confrontation have coalesced today. That is a risk that must be taken very seriously. We must therefore come together, as we have done today, to put an end to the humanitarian catastrophe under way, prevent a spillover of the conflict and seek an inclusive political solution in Syria. These are three indissociable priorities, and our generation will be judged on whether or not we are able to put an end to the Syrian tragedy.

This text is a potentially important step, but it is obviously not the end of the road. Let us be frank: the hardest part has yet to be done. Therefore, on behalf of France, I would like to launch a two-pronged appeal.

The first is a call for the resolution to be fully and immediately implemented. We are all aware that pitfalls and obstacles abound. This is a reflection of the extent to which resolute and coordinated engagement by all members of the Security Council is crucial to ensuring that the provisions we have just adopted are implemented on the ground without delay. To put it even more clearly: if we do not put all our resources

and energy behind the full implementation of this resolution, we know that it will not work. Above all, that applies to Russia and the Astana guarantors.

The second call is to use this truce as leverage to put an end to the spiral of violence in the Syrian tragedy and create positive momentum towards an inclusive political settlement in Syria. That must be our common ambition. There is a glimmer of hope today in that regard. Let us seize this fragile moment to begin to reverse the course of events, despite the magnitude of the difficulties ahead. As the Council knows, France is fully committed to that goal.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom welcomes the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018). In particular, we applaud your work, Mr. President, together with Sweden, as co-penholders.

But this is not a moment for self-congratulation. It has taken us far too long to agree this resolution. While we have been arguing over commas, Al-Assad's planes have been killing more civilians in their homes and in their hospitals, imposing unbearable suffering. Despite the amount of time we have spent in this Chamber over many years discussing the devastating humanitarian crisis, we have still not been able to achieve the peace and security that the Syrian people so desperately need.

As the conflict enters its eighth year, the situation in eastern Ghouta and elsewhere in the country is far worse than we ever thought imaginable. The barbarity and depravity of the Al-Assad regime shows no limits. We must never lose sight of the fact that the pictures we see and the stories we hear from this comfortable Chamber are the agonizing reality for hundreds of thousands of civilians — for men, women and children who are being forced to eke out an existence underground to avoid being killed by a regime that commits daily atrocities against its own people.

I have heard some say that the information about the situation in eastern Ghouta is propaganda. A doctor in eastern Ghouta, having heard such comments, said this morning:

> "Amid the chaos and the bombs, it is the not being believed that almost hurts the most. We are dying here every day. And when people say that they do not believe us, that is pain upon pain."

This is not propaganda. It is a living hell for hundreds of thousands of residents of eastern Ghouta. As we have repeated many times, the intentional and systematic targeting of civilians and civilian objects not only violates international humanitarian law, it is a war crime. The United Kingdom will be unrelenting in our campaign to ensure accountability.

By having voted in favour of the resolution today, we are standing up and saying that we will not stand by and let this happen. In the face of escalating violence, devastation and suffering, we must all now take practical steps to improve the situation for those living and dying in a hell of one man's making. The resolution demonstrates our resolve to put a stop to the brutal violence. It demands that all parties cease hostilities without delay. That means right now, immediately.

The role and responsibility of the Council does not end with the adoption of this resolution, quite the opposite. All States Members of the United Nations, but particularly Council members, must now take responsibility for ensuring that the resolution is implemented in full, without delay.

The resolution calls for the Council to review its implementation within 15 days, but we must all be active in supporting and monitoring implementation from the moment we step out of the Chamber. If we see any of the parties violating the terms of the resolution, we must bring it back to the Council immediately.

Those with any influence over the Syrian regime — Russia, Iran — have a particular responsibility to ensure that the ceasefire is respected in full and without delay, that all sieges are ended and that humanitarian aid is delivered. This is the absolute minimum that the people of Syria deserve.

As much as we welcome the adoption of this resolution today, it is only a small step. Just as one aid convoy in three months to a besieged area cannot even begin to address the humanitarian crisis, one resolution alone cannot solve the situation in Syria. We must do everything in our collective power to ensure that this resolution is effective in delivering for those whom we have failed to date. We must all send a clear message to the Al-Assad regime: abandon your attempt to pursue a military strategy, stop fighting and engage seriously in United Nations-led political talks in Geneva.

In conclusion, let me reiterate the words of my Foreign Secretary. The entire world is looking at the Al-Assad regime, Russia and Iran. They hold the keys not only to the end of this obscene conflict, but to the safety, humanitarian aid and basic medical treatment

that is being denied to millions of people right now in Syria. For the mother giving birth underground in eastern Ghouta, for the child unable to learn as schools are closed for yet another day, for the doctor battling air strikes to treat patients in Idlib — all of us sitting here today owe it to the people of Syria to work together with renewed and unyielding energy to achieve a political solution that will bring peace to the Syrian people.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The recent escalation of conflict in the affected areas of Syria has caught the attention of the international community. We acutely feel the suffering of the Syrian people as if it were inflicted upon us. China condemns all acts of violence that target civilians and civilian property and destroy innocent lives. China welcomes the Security Council's unanimous adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), which is the result of Council members' patient consultation and hard work to find consensus. The resolution includes positive elements such as calling for respect for Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity; demanding a cessation of hostilities by all parties; easing the humanitarian situation in Syria; supporting mine action throughout Syria; and continuing to combat terrorism.

As an active party to the consultation process, China made unflagging efforts and played a constructive role in facilitating consensus-building in the Council. China appreciates that, thanks to the concerted efforts of all parties concerned, the Council arrived at a solution that reflects the broadest possible consensus among Council members. I would like in particular to thank Kuwait and Sweden, as co-penholders of the resolution, for their tireless efforts.

By speaking with one voice on the humanitarian situation in Syria, the Security Council is helping to alleviate the situation as a whole, helping to consolidate the momentum towards a ceasefire, contributing to counter-terrorism efforts in the country and serving the overarching objective of arriving at a political settlement of the Syrian issue. Going forward, the international community should work together to ensure the full implementation of resolution 2401 (2018), so that it can play a positive role in improving the humanitarian situation in Syria.

The only way to fundamentally improve the humanitarian situation in Syria and to lift the people of Syria out of their suffering is to find a political settlement. The international community should support the Syrian parties in seeking a swift solution that is acceptable to all parties in the context of a United Nations mediation through a Syrian-owned and -led political process in order to end the suffering of the Syrian people as soon as possible. China is keen for the Council to remain united and forge consensus on the Syrian issue. The Council must push the Syrian parties to consolidate the momentum towards a ceasefire, strengthen cooperation on combating terrorist groups, advance the process towards a political settlement and play a constructive role in maintaining peace and security in Syria and across the region.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): The delegation of Kazakhstan voted in favour of resolution 2401 (2018), on the cessation of hostilities in Syria. I express my gratitude to the co-penholders — Sweden and Kuwait — for their determined efforts to find common ground among the Security Council members. I also thank the members of the Council for their constructive approach towards the resolution, which has many significant provisions.

The position of Kazakhstan is very consistent — that stability in the Middle East can be achieved by reducing violence for peaceful means and avoiding the emergence of new tensions. In the past few days, Heads of State and Government from around the world have called on the Syrian Government to observe human rights and on both sides to exercise restraint. Simultaneously, external incitement that fuels tension should stop immediately so that it does not endanger regional security.

We see a Security Council united today in demanding that all parties cease hostilities without delay. We now expect all countries that exercise influence on the ground and conduct military campaigns against international terrorist groups in Syria to interact and find common ground for fighting terrorism jointly, while taking practical steps to implement the resolution. Kazakhstan calls on all forces that support an early settlement of the Syrian conflict, including the Government of Syria and the armed opposition, to fully comply with the ceasefire regime and the resolution.

All the parties must ensure safe and unhindered access for humanitarian assistance to reach the affected areas, as well as the evacuation of people in need of medical assistance. The Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan hopes that his colleagues — the Foreign Ministers of the guarantor States of the Astana process — will take additional constructive steps to strictly implement the

ceasefire agreements and support the de-escalation zones in Syria, at the meeting scheduled to take place in the capital of Kazakhstan in mid-March or earlier, if need be.

These were difficult, but successful, deliberations. We should all work collectively to find a peaceful solution. The unity shown today in the Security Council should continue, since we have yet a lot to accomplish in Syria and elsewhere.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): On Wednesday, during the high-level debate on the Charter of the United Nations, I quoted one of the founding fathers of the United Nations, Ambassador Stettinius (see S/PV.8185). He said that the members of the Security Council had the obligation to agree so that the Council may be able to act and act effectively. Today we finally managed to agree to end the atrocious violence in eastern Ghouta; to end attacks against hospitals; and to end the killing of innocent civilians, including women and children.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands welcomes the unanimous adoption of this crucial resolution — resolution 2401 (2018). Let me thank the co-penholders in particular — Kuwait and Sweden — for their tireless efforts and skilled diplomatic work. We pay tribute to them.

Today we have a resolution, now we need to see action on the ground. All United Nations States Members have an obligation to make sure that the words of the resolution are implemented without delay. The Syrian authorities in particular have a specific responsibility towards their own people. The resolution means that all parties must cease hostilities without delay. All parties must engage immediately for a sustainable and durable humanitarian pause of at least 30 consecutive days throughout Syria to enable the safe, unimpeded and sustained delivery of humanitarian aid and services and to enable medical evacuations of the critically sick and wounded, in accordance with applicable international law.

The implementation of the resolution means the cessation of hostilities, the delivery of humanitarian aid and urgent medical evacuations. It is a first step in the right direction, but much more is needed — a political solution, accountability and the return of refugees. The Council should remain seized of the matter and closely monitor the implementation of the resolution, starting today. The Council should reconvene without delay if the situation demands it.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): We highly commend the work of Sweden and Kuwait as co-penholders on the humanitarian resolution for Syria — resolution 2401 (2018) — who did their best to accommodate the concerns of all Security Council members.

On Wednesday I stressed that it is the Council's responsibility to not fail in stopping the ongoing human tragedy in Syria, and in eastern Ghouta in particular (see S/PV.8185). Today we have managed to reach compromise and adopt the resolution by consensus. I would like to thank all my colleagues for their very constructive attitude.

However, the innocent people of Syria have waited far too long for that. Now, all of the parties, especially those with influence on the ground, must make every effort to implement it. In that context, we reiterate our call on all sides to comply with international humanitarian law, cease all hostilities against civilians and allow for free humanitarian access. In conclusion, it is not only our legal obligation to act now, but also our moral duty.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): Following the unanimous adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), I take the floor on behalf of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, whose Government closely followed the whole process leading up to its successful conclusion with the unanimous adoption of this humanitarian resolution.

At the outset, I pay a well-deserved tribute to the penholders, Kuwait and Sweden, for all their efforts, patience and dedication to the goal of drafting a resolution that was ultimately deserving of a favourable vote. We commend the unanimous support of the elected members for the penholders throughout the duration of that process.

In Spanish, it is often said that "it is never too late if the outcome is good". This positive outcome is the result of the contributions of all members of the Council, to which we extend our gratitude and commend for the fruitful end. What lies ahead now is the effective implementation of the provisions of the resolution with a view to achieving the objective the Security Council has set out to achieve, namely, an immediate ceasefire throughout Syria in order to facilitate the safe, unhindered and sustainable delivery

of humanitarian aid, services and medical evacuations of all severely injured and ill persons. The Republic of Equatorial Guinea energetically calls on all parties, the United Nations and those involved in the devastating conflict to do everything possible towards the noble end of saving human lives and alleviating the suffering that has been endured far too long by the people.

The adoption of the resolution partially spares all members of the Security Council from embarrassment. We will save ourselves completely from that shame if the ceasefire takes effect in the next few hours and if humanitarian aid and medical care begin to reach the affected persons over the upcoming days.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Seven years have elapsed since the beginning of this war, and the suffering of the Syrian people continues to worsen. The numerous human lives lost in recent weeks add to the more than 500,000 lost since the beginning of the conflict. We believe that while military tactics prevail over a political solution, there can be no lasting peace, and consequently it will be civilians, especially women and children, who will continue to be subjected to unnecessary suffering. For that reason, we commend the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), and hope that its timely and effective implementation will help to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people.

My delegation underscores and commends the arduous work undertaken by the penholders. The delegations of Sweden and Kuwait have demonstrated strong leadership and resolve up to the very last moment to reach an agreement. Similarly, we wish to acknowledge the effort and commitment shown by the Russian Federation and the parties involved, as well as all members of the Security Council during the negotiation process.

In recent days, my delegation has expressed its position on the matter at hand, and today we do so once again. Consensus and unity within the Security Council are pivotal if we are to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria, which is why we commend the consensus reached today. We reiterate that there can be no military solution to the situation and that the only way forward is through inclusive political dialogue. We thefaffirm our support for the Geneva process and the achievements made in Astana, of which the agreements must be upheld by all parties. Moreover, we have high expectations that the various forums of dialogue, such as the Sochi dialogue, can contribute to the achievement of a final and lasting peace.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): We welcome the unanimous adoption of resolution 2401 (2018) on the humanitarian situation in Syria. We voted in favour because we believe that the resolution can make a positive difference on the ground in the alleviation of the continued tragedy of the Syrians. Having discussed the severe humanitarian crisis in Syria almost weekly, it was clear that what was required from the Council was concrete and collective action that would contribute to alleviating the intolerable suffering of Syrians in all areas of the country. We are pleased that the Council has acted and sent the right message to bring about a cessation of hostilities that will allow the United Nations and its humanitarian partners to have safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access to deliver the much-needed humanitarian assistance to all Syrians in need.

I wish to express our sincere appreciation to the delegations of Kuwait and Sweden, which effectively and efficiently led the process of negotiations. We all know that it was not an easy task, but they did excellent work in accommodating the concerns of all delegations with a high sense of responsibility and patience. We also thank all delegations for their flexibility during the negotiation process. We hope that the positive spirit that led the Council to adopt the resolution will prevail, not only in ensuring its effective implementation, but also in laying the bases for greater mutual understanding among all those with enormous influence over developments in Syria, whether in the humanitarian or political and security domains. We know, given the realities, that this is a tall order.

One matter needs to be stressed on this occasion. The security situation in Syria is perhaps more complicated today than it has ever been over the past few years. We should not overlook the fact that the source of the humanitarian tragedy that we see today is the result of the difficult political and security situation in the country. We trust that all those, including those whom Ambassador Delattre referred to, will continue to play a role in contributing to the creation of the basis for progress in the peace process. That is extremely critical for ensuring that the humanitarian tragedy is Syria is brought to an end.

We can only hope that what the Council has achieved today will lay the basis for averting an even greater humanitarian tragedy in Syria.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We wish to thank you, Mr. President, and your team, as well as the Permanent Representative of Sweden and his team, for the tireless efforts made to achieve this important consensus, and we also thank the members of the Council for their flexibility. This commitment will allow for an immediate cessation of hostilities in Syria and the urgent and necessary provision of humanitarian assistance.

We underscore the need to maintain unity within the Council in terms of its responsibilities to protect the civilian population, in accordance with international law and international humanitarian law.

Peru, a sponsor of resolution 2401 (2017), which we have just adopted, will closely monitor its urgent implementation and compliance therewith by all parties involved. We wish to express our sorrow concerning and solidarity with the victims of the conflict in Syria, and our support and admiration for the United Nations humanitarian workers and those of other agencies deployed on the ground. We hope that the important step that we have taken today will help to achieve a lasting solution to the Syrian conflict in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Côte d'Ivoire, as a sponsor of resolution 2401 (2017), which we have just adopted and which is purely humanitarian in nature, commends its initiators, namely, your country, Mr. President, and Sweden. It welcomes the adoption of the resolution, which demands the cessation without delay of hostilities. This demand on the part of the Council must be upheld by all actors on every battlefield in Syria.

Côte d'Ivoire also welcomes the efforts undertaken by all parties to arrive at a consensus within the Council. It thanks in particular the Russian Federation for its spirit of compromise. The contribution made by all parties to the adoption of the resolution is aimed at saving the Syrian people from the horrific war plaguing that country, which is imperilling the lives of thousands of human beings, specifically civilians, including women and children.

Côte d'Ivoire remains convinced that only a definitive end to the Syrian conflict through negotiations can enable all Syrians to restore peace, achieve reconciliation and rebuild their country, with a view to relaunching its economic and social development. We hope that the 30-day truce demanded by the Council will be the beginning of a process that will bring peace to Syria on the basis of the relevant conclusions and recommendations of all negotiations held in Astana, Sochi and Geneva concerning the country.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Over the past two days, 10 of the thousands of missiles that have fallen on the Syrian capital landed on the headquarters of the Red Crescent in Damascus, the main headquarters of the Syrian Red Crescent, in the Abu Ramani neighbourhood of Damascus. Those missiles were launched by the moderate armed groups in Al-Ghouta. Thousands of people died, including Dr. Hassan, a professor at the Technological Health Institute in Damascus. A French colleague and friend, Thierry Mariani, said:

(*spoke in French*)

> "Like hundreds of others over the past five years, Dr. Hassan Haj Hassan was killed by shells fired from Ghouta on Damascus by these moderate rebels. Those dead and are not entitled to media compassion; they are on the wrong side of history. When will there be balanced coverage?"

(*spoke in Arabic*)

This French citizen accurately described the suffering of the Syrian people as a result of the launching by terrorists of missiles against Damascus. He had visited Aleppo in 2017, and as he was leaving Free Syrian Army gangs fired rockets at the airport. Luckily he was not hurt, but since then the Aleppo airport has been closed because it is unsafe. Also, the head of the Syrian Red Crescent in Idlib, Dr. Muhammad Al-Waty, was kidnapped by moderate armed groups.

My colleague the Permanent Representative of France said that we must observe a truce, and I agree with him. However, I think that we also need to implement the 29 other Security Council resolutions on the situation in Syria, of which 13 relate to the fight against terrorism. We need not only a month-long cessation of hostilities; we also need to see the implementation of the 29 other resolutions that the Council has adopted.

My colleague the British Ambassador told us horrific stories that he heard from other people. Perhaps

he has not heard about what the British forces have done in Iraq, Palestine and Libya.

The British Government went to the Malvinas and fought Argentina for an island that it does not own and that is situated tens of thousands of kilometres away from the United Kingdom. However, I say to my British colleague that his Government — and I am not using the term "regime", because I respect international law — is preventing us from countering terrorism in our own territories. We are not going thousands of kilometres away, we have not been fighting in other countries. It is in our own territories that we are combating terrorism — terrorism that is supported by the Government of the United Kingdom.

During the meeting on Thursday (see S/PV.8186), I explained the reality of what is happening in Syria — the suffering of civilians as a result of the actions of armed terrorist groups. I assure members once again that the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has taken all the de-escalation initiatives seriously and has observed them so as to protect the lives of its citizens and to stop those who have been trading in their pain and blood. In that regard, I note that the Syrian Government has complied with the Astana agreement on establishing de-escalation zones and stipulated a number of commitments, including compelling the signatory armed groups to sever any ties they have with terrorist organizations, especially the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Al-Nusra Front and all other affiliated groups. At the same time, the Astana agreement gave the Syrian Government the right to respond in case of any violations by those armed groups.

It was not at all surprising to us that those terrorist armed groups would not comply with any of those initiatives, but would use them as an opportunity to reorganize their forces and their terrorist fighters, acquire more arms, military equipment, human and logistical support and perpetuate their crimes against the Syrian people. They are receiving instructions from certain States members of the Council, as well as regional actors that are practicing State terrorism to ensure the obstruction and failure of those initiatives and agreements.

Since the signing of the agreement on the establishment of de-escalation zones, these armed groups have systematically violated it. In responding to the violations, the Syrian Government has exercised extreme self-restraint to protect the lives of civilians and salvage the agreement that terrorist armed groups and the countries that sponsor them have been trying to obstruct since the moment of signing it. However, these violations have become repeated and serious and have affected the lives of 8 million civilians living in the capital, Damascus, and its suburbs. Attacks have been waged by launching rockets and missiles and using car bombs, with Syrian military sites being targeted. All this has led to an unbearable situation that we cannot condone. As a State, we bear a responsibility towards our citizens and we have a sovereign right to counter terrorism. We are also receiving repeated appeals from Syrian citizens for protection — their families, their children, their schools — from the acts of these terrorist armed groups

In the light of these violations and terrorist acts, the Syrian Government has had to take the necessary steps to protect its citizens. We exercised our legitimate right to defend them. At the same time, we have taken all the steps necessary to ensure the safety of the civilians who have been taken hostage by these groups and used as human shields inside eastern Ghouta. In cooperation with our Russian friends, we also ensured the safe passage of civilians out of danger from 4 to 14 February. We have provided shelter and food and necessary medical care. The Government has paid for all that assistance. We have called upon armed groups to lay down their weapons and stop their terrorism from residential places and neighbourhoods, and instead engage in national reconciliation initiatives.

Of course, the appeals of 8 million Syrians do not reach the Secretariat or the representatives of the United States, the United Kingdom and France, although they receive appeals from their proxies — terrorist armed groups and White Helmet terrorists, the new legitimate representative of the Al-Nusra Front. It seems that these countries decided today to replace the black flags of ISIL and Al-Qaida with white flags in Iraq and the White Helmets in Syria. We are therefore done with using the black colour; we are using the white colour now, white flags in Iraq and White Helmets in Syria.

According to General Assembly resolution 46/182, which we all negotiated and reached consensus on, the basic principle that governs the delivery of humanitarian aid is respect for the sovereignty of the country concerned as well as coordinating with it fully in any activity in which the United Nations is engaged on the territory of the country in question. However, such principles lose all value when they are

subject to the political whims and double standards of the Secretariat and some more influential countries, particularly when it comes to implementing them in Syria. How else can we explain that some countries submit draft resolutions on the situation in Syria and negotiate them for many weeks with all actors, but excluding the country concerned? This is what I asked the day before yesterday. How do we explain that the Resident Coordinator in Damascus sends a note to the Syrian Foreign Ministry on 14 February stressing that the aid convoys reached 2.3 million Syrians in the so-called besieged and hard-to-reach areas in 2017, while the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs presented completely false figures yesterday to tarnish the image of the Syrian Government and to give Western countries in the Security Council justification for targeting the Syrian Government and its partners? The Resident Coordinator said that aid had reached 2.3 million Syrians. But just two days ago, Mr. Lowcock said that aid had reached only 20,000 people.

Along with some members of the Council, we have said repeatedly over the past seven years that to end the suffering of civilians in Syria we do not need non-consensual draft resolutions, nor do we need to adopt new resolutions or hold regular or emergency meetings. We do not need to deplete United Nations resources to prepare periodic reports that rely on unreliable sources. We do not need to establish a committee here and a body there. We need to implement the 29 — now 30 — Security Council resolutions that have been adopted; it is quite a coincidence that by adopting resolution 2401 (2018) today we have reached 30 resolutions. These resolutions should be implemented.

The Governments of some countries should stop spending billions of dollars to support and finance armed terrorist groups and provide them with arms. The latest we have heard is that the United States of America has allocated $4 billion to ublically fund the terrorists in Syria. Those countries must stop opening their borders and airports to facilitate the flow of terrorist fighters to Syria. They must allow the Syrian people to shape its future and restore its security and stability without any foreign interference.

You said, Mr. President, that the Council rejects anything that violates the purposes and principles of the Charter. Yes, this is very precise. You called also for the implementation of today's resolution in all parts of Syria, which is how we interpret this resolution in Damascus. Resolution 2401 (2018) must be implemented in all parts of Syria, including Afrin, United States-occupied areas and the Golan.

In addition, let me make it clear that the Governments of the United States of America, the United Kingdom and France and their enablers in the region should stop holding meetings in Washington, D.C., Paris and London, establishing groups, bodies or forums and devising what they refer to as strategic plans reminiscent of colonial times. Following a meeting in Washington, D.C., they announced that they had drafted a plan to divide Syria within a year — I am just recounting what they said. The strategic plans contained in the document adopted in Washington, D.C., are aimed at dividing Syria, changing its political system by force, spreading terrorism and maintaining an illegitimate military presence in our territories. I say to my colleague the Permanent Representative of the United States, who threatened us here at the Council a while ago and no one has responded to her, that none of the plans will succeed; they will backfire sooner or later.

According to Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, my country has the right to defend itself with all of the legal tools available. A United States occupying military presence exists in our territories, and we have the right to resist it. The representative of the United States has threatened us. We, in turn, give her a warning from this Chamber because, according to Article 51 of the Charter, we have the right to defend ourselves.

We again stress that double standards will continue to mar international efforts to counter terrorism as long as there is a partial approach to addressing the threat of armed groups in Syria. Some members of the Council claim that they are concerned about an area controlled by terrorist armed groups in eastern Ghouta. The size of that area is 50 square kilometres. They continue to ignore three illegally occupied Syrian territories covering 50,000 square kilometres. They focus on 50 square kilometres and ignore an area of 50,000 square kilometres, of American, Turkish and Israeli occupation. That simple comparison reflects the political hypocrisy of some Member States, and the inaction of the Security Council and of other bodies of the United Nations, as the Organization succumbs to the political and financial polarization that has become the main feature of its working methods.

In conclusion, we will continue, with the support our allies, to counter terrorism regardless of where it exists in Syria — I repeat, regardless of where it exists in Syria. We are exercising our sovereign right of self-defence and a constitutional right in our territory and within our national borders. We do not send forces to conquer areas thousands of kilometres away, as the so-called illegitimate international coalition does in my country, Syria, today. We do not follow the example of French forces in Mali, the Niger and other African countries, or of the United States and United Kingdom in Afghanistan, Libya today and Iraq previously. We defend ourselves and counter terrorism within our borders. We did not go to Mali, the Niger or the Malvinas.

We need serious commitment from Governments that issue instructions to armed terrorist groups. The groups should be given orders to immediately stop targeting civilians and perpetrating terrorist acts — I repeat immediately and without delay, as the resolution stipulates. I stress that the Syrian Government will reserve the right to respond as it deems appropriate if such groups target civilians in any part of Syria with even a single missile.

I take it that we all understand that paragraph 1 of resolution 2401 (2018) also applies to the aggression of Turkish forces in Afrin and the repeated acts of aggression by the international coalition against my country's sovereignty and territories. Of course, resolution 2401 (2018) applies also to the continuous violations by Israeli occupation forces against Syria's sovereignty, by supporting terrorist factions in the occupied Syrian Golan. That is how we interpret the resolution just adopted by the Council.

The meeting rose at 3.35 p.m.